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CHAPTER VIII

THE KAREN VILLAGE-HOUSE

361 [177] 342 The Karen on the plains live in houses of Burmese construction, which are therefore outside the scope of this work. In the Pegu Hills we find the single-structure village, which seems to have been the characteristic Karen dwelling from early times. It might be described as a bamboo apartment-house on stilts, accommodating on the average from twenty to thirty families. It is spread out on one floor, and each family occupies not one "flat" but a room, called in Karen "deu," which faces a central corridor running the length of the barrack.

Such a village, "th' waw," is usually rebuilt on a new site each year. The new location is sought by the local chief during the hot season, after conference with the elders and after the crops have been brought in. The place selected by the chief is fairly level, adjacent to the area to be cut over the coming year, and near a spring or stream that will not dry up during the hot weather. In the old days it was also necessary to choose a site that would be high and easily defended against raids. Before the decision is [78] finally made, the chief must consult the auspices in the form of chicken bones, and if these are propitious and no laughing-bird *(Lanius)* calls "chet, chet," the men begin to cut bamboos with which to construct the village.

342 313 The bamboos selected for posts are twenty or more feet long and usually from four to six inches in diameter. They are set in the ground at intervals of four or five cubits (six to seven and a half feet). Holes are chopped through these large uprights at a height of from six to eight feet above the ground, and pins are thrust through on which bamboo girders of the same size are fastened by means of withes. At right angles to these girders and resting on them, other bamboo poles, slightly smaller in size, are tied at regular intervals of about a cubit to form the floor joists. The floor is made of large bamboos, split, flattened out, and secured to the joists by means of withes of the same material. It is six or eight feet above the ground, springy, and seamed with cracks, through which rubbish and wash water may be disposed of. As

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When a crop has been harvested, the village chief and elders choose the ground to be cut over the following year. Each village has its well-recognized farming areas, beyond which are the lands of the neighboring village. Each member of the communtiy then picks out his particular plot for cultivating, takes home a lump of the earth, puts it under his pillow, and sleeps on it. If he has an auspicious dream, he consults the chicken bones for a confirmation of the good omen. Securing this confirmation, he regards his choice as fixed. Otherwise, he selects another plot and repeats the ceremonies. Once his selection is approved by the auspices, the spot is called a "du la," and he clears a little space on the land, after which he addresses the spirits as follows:

"Depart all you evil spirits ('ta we ta na').
We are going to work here for our food,
To get sustenance for our wife and children.
Let no sickness come upon us.
We are going to work until it is finished."

Next he places a lump of soil on the clearing and, having wrapped the chicken bones in the leaf of a creeper ("ki ku"), he touches the lump with them, raises them towards the sky, and again touches or strikes the clod with the mystic bones. He now breaks these apart and scrapes them until he can insert splints of bamboo into the holes of the bones. If this act of divination is also successful, he is ready for work.

In the early days, when much of the primeval forest was still standing, the Karen would clear out the brush and bamboos from among the giant trees on the hillside they were preparing to cultivate. Then they raised platforms at the foot of the trees from which they could cut them above the broad-spreading buttresses at their base, leaving enough of the trunk intact to keep them from falling. When the whole hillside tract had been cut over in this manner, they felled the uppermost tree so as to crash down on those just below, and these in turn would bring down others until

officers, who should become familiar with the Karen people and language, should develop a plan in accordance with which these tribes might be given reservations of land in exchange for the valuable areas now under their control. These reservations might be either in the hills or on the plains, but the Karens should be taught to cultivate them according to approved methods, in order to gain an ample livelihood. Old racial animosities and the temptation for one people to exploit another militate against entrusting such a policy to Burman officials. It ought to be placed only in the hands of earnest, straightforward Government officials, who have gained the confidence of the Karen and are able to deal with them sympathetically but firmly. This general program would doubtless involve some outlay in supplying cattle, not to speak of competent instruction in modern agricultural methods, animal husbandry, etc.

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apply to the son or daughter of a younger brother or sister of one of the speaker's parents. Grandchildren are "li," a word that is also used of grandnephews and nieces. In conversations with individual Karens I have almost never heard them speak of relatives back of their immediate grandparents, although they use an equivalent compound for our designation, great grandfather. They likewise have more or less frequent need of, and a term for, great grandchild, namely, "lo."

Relationship by marriage is much esteemed among the Karen. It is designated by the general term "do," which is sometimes combined with the word "daw." Thus, a "daw do" is a person related to one by marriage. This relationship is often talked of and is remembered to the second and third generation. It is not an uncommon thing for the usual terms for brothers, sisters, and cousins to be adopted for those standing in the "daw do" relationship to a family.

BLOOD-BROTHERHOOD

In the early days the Karen cultivated three or perhaps only two relationships in blood-brotherhood, that is, brotherhood by the mingling of blood. These three relationships were called "do," "tho," and "mwi," respectively. I should say at once that personally I have found only the two latter, and I note that in Dr. J. Wade's *Karen Dictionary* [1] no mention is made of the "do" relation. Hence, the query has arisen in my mind as to whether or not there has not been a confusion of "tho" used in a different tribe with "do," in somewhat the same way as "th" and "d" are interchangeable consonants in the Burmese language. I offer this explanation merely for what it is worth and proceed on the assumption, until conclusive evidence is adduced, that three is the correct number of relationships in blood-brotherhood.

Writing back in 1868, Dr. Mason describes the "do" relation substantially as follows:[2] "The first and strongest and most sacred of these relationships is that of 'do,' which is entered into in the following way. Of the two persons desiring to enter into relationship the one at home takes a hog or a chicken, cuts off the snout or bill, rubs the flowing blood on the legs of the other and, in case a fowl was used, attaches some of its feathers or down to the drying

[1] Dr. J. Wade, D.D., *A Dictionary of the Sgaw Karen Language*.
[2] Journal, *Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXXVII, 188.

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blood. They then consult the chicken's thigh-bones to see whether or not the auspices are favorable. If they are favorable, they say:

" 'We will grow old together;
We will visit each other's houses;
We will go up each other's steps.'

"The visitor then kills a hog or a fowl and performs the same rites on the other. On consulting the chicken bones, if the fowl's bones are unfavorable, he says:

" 'We will die separately;
We will go separately;
We will work separately;
We will not visit each other's houses;
We will not go up each other's steps;
We will not see each other but for a short time.' "

If the auspices are favorable, the two agree that they have entered into this relation of "do." They regard themselves pledged to each other as friends and bound to help each other in any manner necessary as long as they shall live. They call each other only by the name "do." In seasons of famine one aids the other to the extent of his ability. In case evil is spoken of one, the other defends him, saying: "That man is my 'do.' Do not speak evil of him. To do so is to speak evil of me. I do not wish to hear it."

Formerly it was the custom for many to multiply their "dos" in numerous villages, so that they might receive hospitality wherever they went and, in case of the planning of forays against some village, the "dos" might learn of it from their adopted brethren in other such communities. It is said that "dos" rarely quarreled, but remained faithful to each other. The institution seemed to exert a favorable influence on wild Karen society. Finally, Dr. Mason adds: "It may be compared to Masonry with its secrets."

The relationship named "tho" is formed by two men wishing to become brothers, by each drawing a little blood from his forearm, mingling it in the same cup, and drinking therefrom. Formerly the chicken bones were inspected in connection with this ceremonial, although nowadays they are not always used. This is a lifelong relationship and binds each to defend the other. From the time of the mutual adoption each calls the other "tho," and each speaks of the other by the same name.

The third relationship, "mwi," is one that may be mutually assumed by two young men, two young women, or a young man

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CHAPTER XVI

WARFARE AND WEAPONS

Private Forays

628 787 701 Two or three generations have elapsed since the Karen in Lower Burma indulged in their old-time warfare, which consisted of forays secretly organized and carefully executed against their enemies. In the Toungoo Hills and in Karenni these raids have been suppressed only in recent years, as the regions named have been brought more fully under British rule. The people used to call such expeditions "ta hseh hsu ma beu," which means a strong and concealed thrust. A foray was undertaken by an individual to avenge a personal wrong committed by an inhabitant of another village. It was a recognized method of settling a grievance, like the sheriff's execution of the judgment obtained in a suit at law in a more civilized community. The conflict was not one between village and village, but between personal enemies. The man who inaugurated the foray set up his spear in the open space of his village and marked a white line half-way up on the spear shaft. Those who were ready to go on the expedition and renounce the right of their families to an indemnity in case they were killed, placed their marks above the half-way line, while those willing to join without making this renunciation added their marks below it. Of course, the chicken bones had to be consulted both as to the feasibility of the raid and a favorable time for it.

726 789 When this time had arrived, the organizer of the foray killed a hog or a fowl; took a bit of the heart, liver, and entrails; minced them together; added a little salt, and wrapped the mixture in a leaf. This talisman was then entrusted to two spies, who were to carry it to the village where the foe dwelt. They were admonished to note whether or not any spikes were planted along the paths leading to the place, the best means of access thereto, and the precise location and general arrangement of the village. Finally, they were to visit with the inhabitants there and find an opportunity of dropping the contents of their leaf into the food of their hosts. If they succeeded in this last stratagem, they were supposed to

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have swathed the heads of their foes. That is, their hosts by partaking of the talisman would become so confused as to fail to seize their weapons when needed for defense and would be overwhelmed by the enemy. Unlike the spies of Israel these Karen spies, on their return, usually gave a favorable report and displayed great eagerness for the combat.

The instigator of the foray now sent out for his men, who came not only from his own village, but also from neighboring ones where he had friends and blood-brothers. He might gather in as many as two hundred warriors. These he feasted, but before passing around the liquor he poured some on the ground as a kind of libation, while praying:

"Lord of the seven heavens and the seven earths. Lord of the rivers and streams, the mountains and hills. We give thee liquor to drink and rice to eat. Help us, we entreat thee. We will go forth now and attack yon village. We have swathed the heads of the inhabitants. Assist us. Render their minds oblivious and cause them to forget themselves, that they may sleep heavily and their slumber may be unbroken. Let not a dog bark at us, nor a hog grunt at us. Grant that the villagers may not seize a bow, sword, or spear. May the Lord help my children and grandchildren who go to attack yon village, and may he deliver them from all harm. May they subdue their enemies and not be lost. May they be delivered from the bow, the sword, and the spear."

After this prayer the elders drank in turn of the liquor, and it was then circulated freely among the assembled warriors. The instigator of the foray now killed a fowl, preparatory to inspecting its bones for a favorable omen as to the success of the undertaking, but before the inspection he offered up the following petition:

"Fowl, possessor of superhuman powers, fore-endowed with divine intelligence, thou scratchest with thy feet and peckest with thy bill. Thou goest to Hku Te (the king of death). Thou goest to The Na (monarch of death). Thou goest to Shi U, the brother of God. Thou goest into the presence of God. Thou seest unto the verge of heaven and unto the edge of the horizon. I now purpose to go and attack yon village. Shall we be hit? Shall we be obstructed? If we go, shall we suffer? Shall we die by the bow? Shall we be pierced by the spear? Shall we grow weary or exhaust ourselves? If so, reveal thyself unfavorably." [1]

[1] This prayer, in which superhuman powers are attributed to the fowl, is similar to prayers of the Kenyas of Borneo, who ascribe like powers to the pig.

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726 787 If the reading of the chicken bones proved unfavorable, another fowl was slain, and a third, if necessary. On obtaining a favorable omen, the organizer of the raid harangued his men, telling them that they would surely prove victorious, that he would indemnify the families of any who might be killed, and that he would replace all weapons that might be lost or broken. He assured them that he expected all to return, and declared that no disaster could befall them. Thereupon he called for two volunteers to lead in ascending the ladder to the village-house and making the attack on the arrival of the war-band at its destination. Addressing the volunteer leaders, he promised them drums and buffaloes as rewards for the deeds of valor they were soon to perform. They were to be the hunting dogs, the wild boars, full of cunning and courage. If they should be slain, their families would receive the rewards. If, however, they failed, the disaster of the expedition would be their fault.

726 539 At length, the war-band set forth, chanting verses, as follows:

"I go to war. I am sent.
I go to fight. I am sent.
Clothe me with an iron breastplate.
Give to me the iron shield.
I am not strong. May I take on strength.
I am weak. May I attain vigor."

"I go with a host of men.
We will reach the steps of the house
And fire muskets and shout aloud.
The men will come with wives and children.
Raise the spear and draw the sword.
Smite the neck and pierce the side.
The blood is gushing purple."

"The great hawk flies above the house.
It pounces on the chief's red cock.
It grasps its prey near the lowest step.
It seizes then the chief's white cock,
And the great hawk flies away,
Leaving the chief behind in tears."

726 Whatever one may think of the poetic quality of these three stanzas, they depict vividly the successive stages in their adventure, as the chanting braves conceived it. In the first stanza they

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Youth: "We are pledging each other before the dead.
We shall not be worthy of offspring."

If later during the same festival either one of the pair wished to break the betrothal, they addressed each other in verse, saying:

"We promise each other in rhyme.
Now let us speak verse again.
May evil not come upon us,
Or upon our descendants."

Such verses are called "hta thi kwaw." Unless an engagement thus made was broken off the same night, the young man was under obligation to send a mediator to arrange for the wedding within a short time. If he failed to keep his pledge, his strength to resist an evil charm ("so"), would lapse, and he would go, it was thought, into a decline.

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Many of these practices still obtain among the Karen in the outlying hill-country; and in choosing a bride no step would be taken without divination by the customary method of inspecting the chicken bones, except in the case of the betrothals effected by the young people themselves at the funeral-feasts. It sometimes happens that a young man, seeing a maiden who attracts him, mentions the circumstance to his parents, who approve his choice and send a mediator to her parents with an offer of marriage. As the services of a confidant are required sooner or later in nearly all cases, the omens are consulted and must prove favorable before he proceeds on his mission.[1] If on his way he should chance on anything that is inauspicious, such as the gliding of a snake across his path, the barking of a deer, or the report of a death, he will return home. Otherwise, he continues his journey to the house of the young woman's parents. The conversation that takes place there is carried on in verse characterized by figures of speech which suggest, but do not state explicitly, the purpose for which the mediator came. On entering the house, he sighs, perhaps, and remarks that he is in a trying position. The parents inquire what the matter is, and he answers with a couplet:

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"Give me a white pullet,
And I shall feel better."

[1] See Chapter XXVII, pp. 288, ff.

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The parents apprehend that he is asking for their daughter. If not ready to give her in marriage, they may answer:

"This white pullet we have but raised;
Never once has she cackled."

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THE PARENTS OF THE BRIDEGROOM
Except for the youth with the wedding hats, they are using Burmese instruments on which they are practicing preparatory to the wedding ceremony on the morrow.

The hint is sufficient, and the mediator promptly makes his adieu in plainer speech:

"You have not received me. Do not revile me.
The youth's parents will keep their son."

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You did not consent, but you spoke kindly.
As for me, I am not discouraged."

In case, however, the parents are favorably inclined, but are in doubt as to who the young man may be, knowing that their caller has a son of his own, they ask him:

"Do you come on your own legs,
Or on those of another?"

He replies:

"On the legs of another."

Or they may be uncertain as to whether he intends his offer of marriage for their maiden daughter or the older one, an eligible young widow. So they ask him:

"Are you crossing a flat bridge or a round one?"

The expression "flat bridge" refers to the young widow, the other to the maiden. A "round bridge" is a log, for in the jungle a bridge is commonly nothing more than a log. A flat bridge is one made of planks. The significance of the two expressions as applied by the parents is obscure to me, but is subject to several interpretations. If there should be two unmarried daughters in the family, both eligible, the parents would inquire:

"Have you come for a basket of rice
Or only for a mortarful?"

The basket, being the larger receptacle refers to the older and, presumably, larger maiden.[1]

584 During his first call the mediator does not expect to progress far in his negotiations. If he has been favorably received, the family may kill a chicken and invite him to eat with them. He departs without knowing what the outcome will be, and the parents find an early opportunity to get the consent of their unmarried daughter to become a married woman ("mü pgha").

On his second visit a few days later the intermediary may find the father sitting at the front of the house and probably overhears him call out to the mother at one of her tasks within: "Here comes that male buffalo. Shall we tether him or let him go?" If she shouts back: "We might as well tether him," he knows that his proposal will be accepted. Even should she reply to the contrary, the caller would enter the house and pay his visit, but would make

[1] The Karens often use the word "larger" in referring to an older child.

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no reference to the object of the call. This whole procedure illustrates not only a Karen, but also an Oriental, trait of character. The Oriental deals in indirect methods, rather than run the risk of saying something disagreeable. 584

Realizing that his mission is not in vain, the intermediary enters the house of the prospective bride's parents in joyous mood, fairly shouting the Karen version of "tra-la-la," which is "traw-le, wa-le, ho-o-o." They sit down and discuss the matter. Then the parents kill a fowl or a pig, and the guest stays for dinner in token that the bargain is sealed. After the date for the wedding-feast has been set, the intermediary returns to the young man's family and reports his success. As a rule the time of the feast is fixed by the maiden's parents, but it is sometimes determined by the youth's family.

The only month that is tabu for wedding-feasts is "La plü" (December). This is the month when the moon is most often eclipsed (swallowed by the dogs). To many the month seems as though it were killed and is, therefore, regarded as inauspicious for new life. Others say that it is the month when neither birds nor animals mate, and that it is unwise for men to undertake to start a new household. The favorite months for marriages are March and April in the dry season, because the harvest is past, the weather is good, and there is plenty to eat and drink. The date of the wedding must fall during the waxing of the moon, which augurs an increasing family. This important point being settled, the prospective bride busies herself less with the preparation of her own trousseau than with the weaving of a set of new garments for her future husband, including a white turban, a white blanket with a red stripe running through it lengthwise, and, in the olden days, a "hse plo" or single smock. The maiden's family prepare the rice, fish-paste, pork, and liquor for the feast. The prospective groom has only to make for himself a horn to be blown at the festivities. On the plains and in those places in the hills where each family has its separate house, a booth or "k'la pyeh" is built close at hand for the wedding-feasts.[4] This structure must be so placed as to have its entrance towards the tail of the "p'yo" or great dragon of the Karens. Not long ago I saw such a booth, which was enclosed on three sides and had a small open entrance to the east. The south side was entirely open. Access to the structure was had

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[4] This booth is often called a "mandat." The name, "k'la pyeh," is from the Burmese. Perhaps the booth itself is of Burmese origin, but I do not know.

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585 tomary to sprinkle the bridal floor with rice to give the pair a fruitful married life. Possibly the showering of rice on newly married couples in the West had originally a similar significance. However, I have been told that in the olden times couples often refrained from living together for months or even a year or two after their marriage.

585 784 787 Many tabus were formerly observed by parties going to a wedding. If they heard of a death, passed a funeral, or came into contact with anything connected with a burial, the intermediary at once halted his companions and directed them to recall their "k'las." If a snake crossed their path, he stopped them and addressed the reptile: "You follow your path, and we will follow ours. Our way is short and pleasant. Yours is long and evil." If they happened to hear the call of the red-headed woodpecker, which is considered a bird of ill-omen, he would cry out: "You may be sick and die. It is nothing to us. Let the white ginger burn you." If they came upon a dead wild animal, the intermediary reminded the company that death, having taken its victim, would not touch them. Chancing to meet another wedding party, the two groups exchanged the greeting: "May you be free from all evil, and may you have peace." If either company had liquor with them, they all drank together.

Certain tabus made it necessary for the whole party to sit down where they were and wait until they believed the danger was past. They did this when they heard the call of the plover, the cry of the barking-deer, the "tauke te" of the lizard, or the scream of the woodpecker. When about to renew their journey after an interruption of this kind, they pretended to spit something out of their mouths, saying: "Let all evil remain on you." A sneeze would halt the entire retinue until the leader was assured that no more sneezes were to follow.

585 591 According to modern usage the groom is supposed to remain in his wife's house three, seven, or any other number of days required by her parents. After the specified interval has elapsed, he is free to go about as he pleases; but he seldom returns to his own village, except for a brief visit. The general custom is for the husband to settle down with his parents-in-law, a practice that looks much like a survival from the matriarchal stage of the Karen's past.

586 Should the marriage prove unsatisfactory to the wife or her parents and they wish to sever the connection, they must purchase their release by paying the husband an ox or one hundred rupees.

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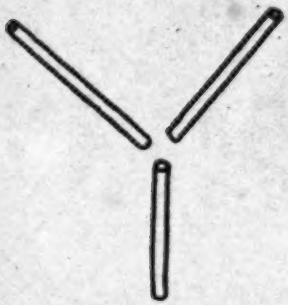
clear the sticks is regarded as a bad omen, showing that the spirit of the dead man has encountered some obstacle on its journey to its next abode. It is, therefore, incumbent on the jumper to try the center leap over again until he gets through safely.[1]

The next game in order is that of "pounding the pestles" ("ta to kli"). In this game three young men, each provided with a pestle or bamboo stick, take their places at equal intervals about a central spot on the ground, which forms the target at which they strike in turn. A fourth youth must jump first from one side and then another to the center and out again before each stroke falls, and the fourth time also when the wielders of the sticks strike together. In this game the jumper runs considerable risk of getting hit on the feet, unless he is very spry in his movements.



A third game with the pestles is called "stretching the neck" ("ta leh kah"). The four pestles required in this game are held in "criss-cross" fashion as in the first jumping game, but as high as one's shoulders. A young man stands beneath them, and another stands at one corner waving a naked sword above them. The four holding the ends of the pestles strike them together at brief intervals, while the youth beneath them must thrust his head up between the ends of the sticks and withdraw it again before they close about his neck, or the swinging sword touches him. Having done this on three sides in succession, the fourth time he must attempt it through the square in the middle. If he is successful in making the circuit three times without getting "his neck stretched," the assembled company are entitled to feel satisfied that it is well with the soul of the departed.

"Climbing the fruit tree" ("htaw the tha") is a very different kind of game from those described above, involving no physical risk inasmuch as it is a performance in pretending. A conventionalized picture of a tree with a knot part-way up the trunk, two

[1] Dr. Nieuwenhuis tells of a rice-pounder dance in Borneo performed by the women, who skip into the center and out again between the simultaneous strokes of the rice pestles. This dance is not unlike the funeral game described above. He also shows a picture of wrestling in Borneo, a sport evidently conducted like wrestling among the Karen. See plate 18, p. 137 of Dr. Nieuwenhuis's *Quer durch Borneo* (Leyden, 1907).

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531 illness not come upon our people. O ye Great Spirits that rule the heaven and the earth, receive our offerings and have mercy upon us. From now on may our land be fruitful, may the work of our children prosper, may they keep well. Forget our evil deeds, which bring distress. May these things come to pass because of the offerings that we are now making."

782 The young men hamstring the animals and cut their throats as
787 soon as the chiefs remove their hands. The blood is poured around the place of sacrifice. The gall-bladders are examined to see if they are full and well-rounded. If so, the sacrifice is thought to be acceptable. Otherwise, it is evident that the sins of the people are not yet absolved and will not be, until they provide satisfactory animals. Assuming, however, that the first offering proves to be acceptable, the hair is burned off of the animals. Their heads and feet are cut off and laid upon the altar, and seven bamboo water-joints are fastened to its posts. When the flesh is cooked the great chief goes to the altar, takes some rice and meat on a silver tray, fills all of the bamboo joints and puts some of the food down at various places on the altar. He then eats a morsel himself, after which each of the others eat in turn.

783 While this ceremony is in progress, every one must confess his sins. If there is any doubt about a person, he must remove it either by the water ordeal or by that of climbing a tree. The water ordeal consists of two parts. First, the person doubted and the one doubting him take each a plantain stem and toss it into the swift current of the river. The chief notes which stem is thrown up higher by the water. Second, this part is far more serious: it consists in pushing the two men under the water and holding them there by means of forked sticks across their necks. The first one struggling up for air is accounted the loser. If he is the same one whose plantain was tossed lower than that of his opponent, he is regarded as surely guilty.

In the ordeal of tree climbing the contending men are sent in turn up a tree that has been cut around the foot until almost ready to fall. The climber must ascend to the top and throw down a garment so deftly as not to touch any one of a number of spears set up around its base. During the test the tree must not sway or creak, much less fall. The one who performs this feat with the least disturbance to the tree is the winner.

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C. The Small Sacrifice of the Sgaw

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Besides the great sacrifice offered by the Sgaw to the lords of the land, they also make a small sacrifice ("Ta lü hpo") to the same powers. A few men—the exact number being determined by divination—build a little booth in the jungle and clear three paths leading from it. They sacrifice a white fowl, letting some of its blood into a bamboo joint containing liquor. Some of the blood is smeared on the outside of the joint and on the posts of the booth, and feathers from the fowl are stuck to it. A kind of broom is made by splitting a bamboo, with which they beat the booth, while praying: "O Lords of the land and water. Let the sick member of my family change places with this fowl. Forgive his sins and free him from disease." Sometimes they address their prayer to the water-witch: "We are offering thee the blood of this fowl. Eat this and go thy way. Do not come near us." After cooking and eating the fowl, they color a little cotton thread yellow and wind it about their water-joint. Having returned home, they draw water and sprinkle some of it on the sick person. A piece of the colored thread is then tied around his waist so that the demon may identify him as the one for whom the offering was made. They must not permit any one to accompany them on their sacrificial journey or to converse with them.

II. Offerings for the Sick

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The small sacrifice described above is one of the offerings for the sick, but because it is made to the lords of the land rather than to the evil spirits who entice away and feed upon the "k'las" of human beings, I have grouped it with the offerings to those deities. Certain demons are malicious and require placating and diverting to keep them from indulging in this practice, which results in the illness and perhaps the death of the persons involved. Divination may indicate that some particular demon, for example, one of the water-witches ("Na hti") or one of the ghosts of tyrants that dwell in the jungles ("T're t' hka"), is engaged in this nefarious work. If so, the rites peculiar to that demon must be executed in an effort to induce it to leave the village and follow the person carrying the offerings to some lonely spot in the jungle, there to remain and partake of the aroma of the feast, much as one would entice

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753 787 782 a pig from rooting in the garden to follow an ear of corn back to its pen. Having gone through this performance, the carrier stealthily returns, trying on the way to deceive the demon into believing that he has taken some other trail by blocking the one he has actually followed, and fondly thinking that he has removed the cause of the sickness of the member of his household.

I am led to believe that many offerings are made in remote districts that belong in this group, although I have obtained no accurate account of them. The recital in the succeeding paragraphs will suffice, however, to convey a general idea of the nature of these rites, in all of which, when the ceremony is concluded, the wrist of the patient is tied around with a string to keep the "k'la" from getting away again.[6]

The offering made when the "T're t' hka," or ghosts of evil tyrants that inhabit the deep jungles, wander into the village and attack the "k' la" of some one, is called "Ta taw law ta." This rite requires the weaving of a small basket, in the bottom of which cotton is laid, and on this four lumps of cooked rice, one colored black with soot, another yellow with tumeric, the third red with amotta berries (from the *Bixa orellana*), and the fourth left white. A chick is tied to the basket, being made secure by binding both its wings and its feet. Finally, sprigs of yellow and white cockscomb are laid in the basket.

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The basket thus fitted out is carried beyond at least two ridges of hills to a place from which it is believed the demon will not be able to find its way back. There the basket is set down with its contents, and the following petition is offered: "We are bringing you red and yellow rice and yellow and white flowers, O Great 'T're t' hka.' Go back to your own place. Keep away from us." The performers of this rite may sweep a spot under the basket and pick up a clod of earth near at hand. Calling the "k'la" to follow them they leave the chick and rice with the basket to be the food of the ghost and return home. As they go along they break off branches which they place in the path to throw the demon off their track, should he attempt to follow them.[7] On arriving at the house, they

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[6] It is not uncommon to see a black line tatooed about a Karen's wrist, the obvious purpose of which is to serve as a permanent hindrance against the escape of his "k'la," thus preventing sickness.

[7] In traveling if one who goes ahead wishes to warn those following not to take a certain path, one puts branches across its entrance. Thus, notice is given that the path is "killed" and not to be taken.

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call out to ask whether the patient has recovered or not, and, on being assured that he has, they ascend the ladder and put a bit of the clod in the hole of his ear-lobe, believing that they have taken ample measures to promote his recovery.

In performing the ceremony called "Ta hu law pa law," a bundle containing a handful of chaff, a piece of broken pot, and a few chicken feathers is used to touch the sick person, while "Ta mü to xa, Ta yu ta pleh" are addressed as follows: "O Spirits and very bad Witches, we are cooling your anger lest you look with longing eyes on this person. Restore and heal him. Go back to your places, east, west, north, or south. Return to your own abodes." The bundle is then borne out along a path indicated by the omens and left there. The person carrying it pretends to retire into the jungle, but really returns home.

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In the rite known as "Ta taw the hka heh" the patient's friends carry to a considerable distance a little basket containing a chick and a prepared betel quid. A similar petition to that given above is then uttered, and the chick is split in halves and replaced in the basket, which is hidden in some hollow tree or rock crevice. Again a plea is made, the basket and its contents are left behind, and a circuitous route home is followed, the bushes along the way being cut in order to convince the demons by the marks of the knife that they will be cut by it, should they follow after.

The rite performed when the water-witches are supposed to have enticed a "k'la" away is called "Ta lu hti htu hti." A fowl of one color must be carried down to the water, where a small altar is erected of two rows of twelve posts each, the two rows converging like the rafters of a roof. The fowl is killed and its blood smeared on the posts, four feathers being stuck on each of the corner posts. The lords of the water and the lakes, the water-witches, are then besought, in case the sick person has invaded their province in any way or they have caused his illness, to partake of the fowl, sweet liquor, and rice that are provided and allow the "k'la" to return and the person to recover. The petition closes with the words: "Do not look with longing eyes upon him, but eat your feast here." The sick man's friends then cook and eat the fowl and return home.

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It appears that sometimes the water-witches are offended by a person who is in bathing and cause him to become ill with cramps or indigestion. In such a case rice, saffron, and spices are placed

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782 elder takes the stirring-stick from its hole in the fireplace post and
753 strikes the top of the house ladder to attract the attention of the
755 "k'la," which he begs to return, saying: "Pru-u-u we, pru-u k'la, come back, whether you have gone to the west, east, north, or south; come back, whether you are in the bush, jungle, or ends of the earth; come back to your pleasant dwelling, to your comfortable home. I will prepare delicious pork and fowl for you. Eat of your rice and drink of your liquor. Do not wander off any more." Then the animal specified in the divination is killed—pig, fowl, goat, ox, or buffalo—and if a fowl, its bones are examined for the omen, which is favorable in case the holes are even in number. In case one of the animals has been indicated, the performers of the rite look for a rounded gall-bladder. If the auspices are unfavorable, they must repeat the whole operation until they find the conditions satisfactory. The animal is then cut up, cooked, and the feast proceeds. During these ceremonies every member of the family must be present.

787 The rite, "Ta waw k'la" (driving back the "k'la"), has some
782 features not found in the one described in the preceding paragraph
753 and is performed in the jungle and along the paths where the ghost
755 has disappeared, as revealed by the divination. The man of the house splits the end of a bamboo pole into four splints and spreads them into a crude broom, which he takes to the place where the "k'la" became lost. With a prayer similar to that quoted above he calls the wandering "k'la" and beats the bushes all the way home. Before entering, he asks the usual question about the return of the ghost and receives the usual answer. Mounting to the house, he beats the top of the ladder with the stirring-stick, repeating the invitation to the "k'la" to return and then beats the posts of the fireplace, asking repeatedly if it has come back and getting the same reply. Finally, the animal or fowl is killed and the omen declared. In case it is favorable, the feast proceeds.

The rite for the return of a "k'la" thought to have been driven off by the wind is called "Ta yaw ke a k'la." A bracelet is suspended by a string from the tip of a slender bamboo over a cup containing a little sticky rice and a hard-boiled egg. The elder strikes the cup with the stirring-stick and begs the "k'la" to come back out of the winds, the storm, the firmament, from near the stars or the moon, and eat the egg. The string supporting the bracelet is

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usually poorly spun, and the suspended object twists back and forth until finally the string parts, and the ornament drops into the cup. A person standing near claps a cloth over the receptacle to confine the "k'la." If an air-space is found at the end of the egg, it is a sign that the shade has returned; if not, the experiment must be repeated.[13]

The ceremony, "Ta hpi htaw ke a k'la," is in order when a person's sickness is attributed to the detention of his "k'la" under the water or in a swampy place. The auspices having shown the necessity for this rite and the kind of creature to be sacrificed, the performers of the rite throw up a little mound at the foot of the ladder with a sharp bamboo stick or other implement, and set upon it in order bundles of glutinous rice and jars or bamboo joints of liquor. The victim, say a fowl, is plucked, and, after the shade has been attracted by making a noise, it is addressed as the great "k'la": "If you have been drowned in the water or are anywhere under the mud or the ground; if you have been led astray in the water or the mire," says the leader, "I beg you to come back to your pleasant dwelling, to your comfortable home. Come eat delicious pork and toothsome chicken. Come and partake of sweet liquor and white rice." The victim is struck on the head with the stirring-stick, killed, and the omens examined. If these prove to be favorable, the fowl is cooked and the feast is held. As is usual in such ceremonies when the shade is believed to have returned, the wrist of the patient is tied with string to prevent its wandering again. A piece of the string, together with a morsel of the rice and meat, is placed on the fontanel ("hko hti") of the patient, which is considered the seat of the "k' la."

Prophets and Elders

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The propitiatory sacrifices discussed in the first section of this chapter are evidently tribal functions and are, therefore, inaugurated by the chiefs. Formerly men called "wi," especially designated as prophets, were consulted to interpret the auspices. On occasion they went into trances in order to reveal secrets. Their office in most of the Karen tribes was for life or while they maintained a good character, and it involved a knowledge of the ancient poetry of

[13] See p. 297 of Chapter XX (Funeral Customs) for a similar method of determining the presence of the "k' la" of the dead.

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the folk by which the traditions and customs were handed down from generation to generation. Among the Bwe, who seem to have esteemed priests more than the other tribes, there were four of these prophets who presided over the great sacrifice, the eldest being regarded as high priest. When one of them died, the elders assembled and chose which of his sons should inherit the office. Then, earrings, a headband, richly ornamented clothing, and a silver-mounted sword were secretly prepared for the ceremony of installation. A delegation of the elders took these gifts to the house of the chosen one, an elder going ahead to ascertain that he was at home. The party, being assured of his presence, surrounded the house to prevent his escape, which he must feign attempt. The presents were then cast before him. If he really desired to escape, he must do so before the house was surrounded.

In case the elders did not find the chosen successor at home, they laid in wait for him either by the path approaching the house or within the house itself. Sometimes an elder climbed up under the roof, hid himself until the man returned, and then dropped the gifts at his feet. The appurtenances of the priestly office, having been presented, could not be refused.[14] In some instances a "wi" was also a chief, serving thus as a leader in the tribe and in its magic. In any case he was a most important personage and was held in awe by the people.[15] Only a few of these men now remain.

The healing offerings dealt with in the second and third sections of this chapter fall generally within the province of the village elders, or are often performed by the members of the family of the sick person, for almost everybody knows more or less how to make the offerings, though this is not so true at the present time as it was a generation ago.

[14] Bunker, *Soo Tha*, pp. 96, ff.

[15] For the "wi's" connection with magic, see p. 278.

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whole family. She is the "Bgha a' hko." This custom seems to hark back to the matriarchal stage of development among the Karen, as also does the fact that the groom goes to live with the bride's family. Why a woman should hold the place of honor at the "Bgha" feast has been "explained" to me in two ways, namely, (1) that a female was the first person to fall under the influence of "Mü kaw li" (Satan) in the orchard, and (2) that as the woman is the more susceptible to sickness, she properly has more to do with the offerings and should take the leading part in making them. The Karen maintain that the elders are responsible for these explanations and that the ceremonial of the "Bgha" feast has come down from time immemorial.

There are three kinds of "Bgha" feasts. The most familiar kind is that observed by the members of the immediate family when one of their number has fallen sick, in case divination shows that his illness is due to his having offended the "Bgha." In such a case the family must at once join in a feast. The second kind of feast is that observed as a preventive of possible sickness and as a means of keeping on good terms with the "Bgha." This is known as "ta aw bwaw a' tha" (eating to strengthen one's heart). The third kind of feast is that participated in by all the kindred, when the most elaborate rites are celebrated. Such a feast is called "ta aw saw ke saw na." While there is a general resemblance among the feasts held all over the Karen country, the various tribes and even parts of the same tribe differ in the details of their observances.

In the case of an illness found by divination to be due to the "Bgha," the ceremonial of the feast among the Sgaw Karen of the Tharrawaddy district and in the Pegu Hills, is as follows: After a pot of rice has been set on the fire to boil, a fowl is caught and killed, and its feathers are burned off in the fireplace. It is then cut up and cooked with salt and a chili and placed on the table or family tray. The father, mother, and children in the order of their ages severally partake of a morsel, after which they eat their meal together. If the parents of the father and mother are living, the feast is held in the morning; but if they are dead, it is held in the afternoon. On the following morning a pig is caught, brought into the house, and its legs are tied together. It is then killed by strangulation or by wrenching the neck, care being taken not to break any of its bones or bruise its skin lest some of its blood should be spilled. The body of the pig is then run through lengthwise on

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a spit, its bristles are burned off, and it is then carried into the house and laid at the head of the sleeping-mats. The father and other members of the family touch the side of the animal with the tips of their fingers. In Shwegyin and Siam this rite is still observed, but in many other localities it has been discontinued. The pig is now ready to be cut up and cooked, after which the members of the family each taste of the meat in turn, avoiding eating anything from the hind-quarters that day and from the fore-quarters the next, in case their grandparents are living. If, however, their grandparents are dead, they may eat from any part of the animal. After having thus each taken a morsel, they complete their meal. If any is left after the feast, it is not uncommon nowadays for the family to invite in some of their neighbors to finish the remainder. This is contrary to the old practice among the Karen.

In the remoter regions, where the complete ceremonial is still observed, its main features differ but little from those described above, but the details are much more fully observed, and I will, therefore, describe the ceremonial as it is carried out in those areas. The rice having first been cooked, the water from it must be poured into the fireplace and the pot set down in the wet ashes, while the chicken is caught by the wife who brings the fowl into the house and hands it to her husband. He holds it under his arm, strokes its beak toward the point, and says: "Take away sickness. Remove weariness and swellings. Give me life and health for a hundred years." Then the wife and each child in turn stroke the chicken's beak, while the father repeats the same prayer for each one. He next wrings the fowl's neck, scalds the bird in a jar of water, plucks its feathers and carefully puts them in a receptacle by the fire, and removes the intestines and places them with the feathers. The flesh is cut up, cooked, and served, each member of the family taking a morsel. The father now places a small quantity of the rice and chicken on a tray and summons "the great ancestors of old" to partake. Meantime, the family eat the feast, after which the father throws away the offering. The pig is eaten on the following day, but in Siam two days are allowed to elapse before this part of the feast is celebrated. In preparation for this event the father goes into the jungle after an early breakfast, taking with him one of his children or, if he has no child, calling some other boy to accompany him. He carries a small basket and his "xeh" or sickle. He returns with two pieces of bamboo, each two full joints in

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length, some plantain leaves, and a pole long enough to serve as a spit for the pig. He cuts one of the bamboo pieces into two sections in which to cook the rice and curry, and splits the other bamboo into withes. After the rice has been cooked, the mother mixes a little of it with chaff, puts some of it in a small pot and a lump of it on top of the pot, besides sprinkling water on the fireplace.

A Shaw Karen Grandmother

Later the lump of chaff and rice is used as a bait in catching the pig that is to become the offering. Two withes of the outside and two of the inside of the bamboo are used in tying the feet of the animal, and one more of each kind to bind the feet together. Other withes are wound around the snout, one turn being passed through the mouth, which is thus closed securely. The pig is now carried into the house and laid on plantain leaves spread on the floor, a winnowing-tray being placed in front of it along with the

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pot of rice and chaff and a small bamboo cup ("maw"). Three times in succession the father touches first the pig and then the pot with the tips of his fingers, while addressing the "Bgha" as follows: "Avert all sickness from me. Let me be well and live a long life. I am feeding you with pork. Therefore, help me." The same petition is uttered as the other members of the family touch the pig in their turn. The father then strikes the animal three times with his "xeh" and stabs it thrice with a knife, but not to a greater depth than the width of four fingers. The killing of the pig is completed by binding its snout in a wet cloth to smother it and by wrenching its neck. The withes are now removed from its feet, and the carcass is carried to another part of the room and washed. After being laid again on the plantain leaves, an opening is made in its belly for the purpose of examining the gall-bladder. If this organ is plump, the omen is favorable and the feast may proceed. Otherwise, another pig must be sacrificed on the following day, and if necessary another, until a gall-bladder is found that meets the required conditions.

A satisfactory offering having been obtained, the intestines are removed and the carcass is impaled lengthwise on the sharpened stick brought from the jungle, and the bristles are burned off at a new fireplace built for the feast in the inner room of the house. After the body is washed it is butchered: first the head and stabbed shoulder being cut off in one piece, then the hind leg on the same side, next the fore and hind legs on the other side. The carcass is now opened down the front and down the middle of the back, the side that was stabbed being first removed and prepared. The wife puts the currypot on to boil, while her husband cuts up the meat, including the heart, liver, and lungs, some of which is dropped into one of the bamboo joints over the top of which a plantain leaf is tied. The other bamboo joint is filled with rice, and both vessels are set over the fire and watched carefully to prevent burning. However, the vessels must not be removed from the fire before their contents are thoroughly cooked, else the offering would be offensive to the "Bgha."

The rest of the pork is cooked in the currypot, which the wife has set on the fire. The wife must clean out the intestines, which she does outside the house. When she brings them in, the husband brushes off any ashes that may be on the top of the little pot and covers the mouth of it with a plantain leaf. He makes

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little holes in the covering and inserts short pieces of bamboo down into the pot obliquely, so as to hold the cover on. He then pours water in through these holes. He now makes a sort of standard, called "thi keh," out of a strip of bamboo. The bamboo is split into three strips, but not entirely separated. They are bound together at three points with withes, and then the two outer ones are broken between the bindings but only enough to make them stand out like arms akimbo. The lower ends of each of the side strips are bent out and then brought back and inserted in a hole, or under the lowest withe around the stock. This is set in the pot. What the significance of this is, neither my informant could tell me, nor do the reference books help one to find the meaning of it.

When the food has been cooked, the husband empties the rice on one tray and the pork on another; and the members of the family—father, mother, and the children in succession according to their ages—each take a morsel from both trays. Then the father takes a swallow from a pot containing water or liquor, being followed by the others in due order. He also pours out two cups of the liquid for the ancestors of the family and throws the rest away. He collects into a bundle the withes used in tying the feet of the pig and hangs it on the end of one of the floor joists at the rear of the house. Finally, he washes his hands and returns to join his family in finishing the feast.

In case the grandparents are living, they are summoned to the "Bgha" feast and arrive on the evening preceding the event. After breakfast next morning the preparations are made much the same as described above, but include the providing of three little bamboo cups ("maw") and the construction of a tiny model of a house ("hi hpo hkeh") about a foot long, which is set in front of the pig and in which the favorable gall-bladder of the animal is placed, together with its heart and the lung and kidney of the side that has been stabbed. The organs of the other side and any blood remaining in the abdominal cavity are placed on a tray. Only the flesh of the stabbed side is used at once. While it is cooking, the wife pounds some rice, moistened with a little water, until it is reduced to fine flour. Two of the cups are filled with a mixture of this flour, chopped pork, and a little blood, and hung over the fire to cook. The wife washes the intestines of the animal, while her husband arranges the "thi keh" as before and dishes out the food for the family. When all is ready each member of the household partakes of a morsel and

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782 sip of liquor, the grandfather and grandmother coming after the
753 children. This ceremonial being completed, all eat together. In
755 the afternoon the intestines are cooked and eaten. Next morning
the husband removes the heart, lung, and kidney from the miniature
796 house, cuts them up, and cooks them. These are eaten, the room is
787 cleaned, the little house is thrown away, the grandparents return
home, and the sick person for whom the feast has been held is supposed to recover.

In some places the intestines of the pig and the blood-stained plantain leaves are put in a basket and hung on a tree in the jungle as an offering to "Thi Hko Mü Xa," the lord of the demons.

782 The second kind of "Bgha" feast is not preceded by divination.
602 It is held not to cure sickness in the family, but to prevent it. When one of the parents begins to worry lest illness may visit the family, the "Bgha" is feasted and venerated and the hearts of the family are thus strengthened, as they express it. Hence, this feast is called "Ta aw bwaw a' tha." The ceremonial does not differ from that described above.[1]

The third kind of feast is that in honor of the great "Bgha," in which all the kindred by blood participate. It is, therefore, called the feast of the whole family ("ta aw saw ke saw na"). The eldest female of the family, the grandmother if living, or if not her eldest daughter or granddaughter, presides as chief priestess or head of the "Bgha" ("Bgha a' hko"). If the feast is held annually, it occurs in April or May; but the priestess may fix a time at her pleasure when she feels that the "Bgha" should be honored and propitiated. Those required to attend this feast of the kindred are the full brothers and sisters of the priestess, her sons, daughters, and daughters' children; but her husband, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and their sons, together with her sons-in-law and the sons of her sons, are excluded and eat their feast with their own kindreds.

The eligible members of the family having assembled, the grandmother holds a pair of fowls, male and female, by their heads and says: "O Lord of the demons, we are offering to thee the flesh of fowls and pigs. Free us from all illness." After wringing the necks of the chickens, she orders their feathers to be burned off preparatory to cooking them with salt and chili only. Rice is also cooked. These viands are set out and the priestess eats a morsel, followed by her sons and each of the other relatives in the

1 [For description of ceremony, see p. 248 ff, Cat. 116 - Analys

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unwittingly rendering their offerings futile. The advantage of the village guest-room then became clear to me. There I and other strangers could be entertained, and there the men who were ineligible to attend the feast of the family they had married into could congregate and visit, while their relatives were participating in the "Bgha" ceremony.

The idea of sacrifice is undoubtedly at the root of the "Bgha" feasts. According to the explanation of an old Karen woman, when one has offended the family spirit or, as the people say, has "hit the 'Bgha'" ("pgha ba Bgha"), one has fallen on the worst possible fate; for the demon will seek to devour the life principle ("k' la") of the unfortunate one, unless propitiated by offerings of chicken and pork. The "Bgha" is supposed to be satisfied with the "k' la" of these sacrifices, which constitute the best eating within the knowledge of the Karen people. Even those who no longer fear their "Bgha" will call in the members of their family and make a feast, principally on account of their own enjoyment of it. In such cases they add the spices for a curry, instead of cooking the meat with only salt and chili. The Karen, especially those of Shwegyin, declare that fornication, adultery, and incest anger the family spirits more than any other offenses. Such acts of immorality incite the "Bgha" to curse the soil, blight the crops, and send epidemics among the people. Once aroused, a "Bgha" will assume the form of a tiger or snake and wait for its victims, in order to destroy the "k'las" of the offenders and other inhabitants of their village. In case of a poor season and bad crops the elders become suspicious and sometimes succeed in scaring young persons into a confession of their secret sins. Unusual offerings are required to appease the offended demon, these being—according to one list in my possession—first, a buffalo, next, an ox, and finally, a chicken and a pig. All the family must unite in an earnest prayer that these offerings may prove acceptable to the "Bgha" and avert any further calamities from them. The great fear of blighted crops, and of other evils not less feared because unknown, tends to keep the Karen a chaste people, which they certainly are for the most part.[2]

The traditional explanation of the use of the chicken bones and the pig's gall-bladder in divination, and of pork and fowls in the family feasts, is that the chickens and pigs ate most of the fragments of the God-given book which the white brother delivered to

[2] See pp. 30, 139, 142, 148, 192, 225, 288.

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the Karen back in the mythological age, and which the latter carelessly burned when he set fire to the brush that he had cut from his field. What offerings more acceptable to the "Bgha" could be made than the creatures that had absorbed the wisdom of the divine book?[3] That the pig is regarded as a vicarious sacrifice is shown by the rite in which the members of the family touch the side of the animal, while the "Lord of the spirits" is asked to protect them from sickness and sorrow. However, the Karen do not charge the pig with a message to the great spirit, as do the Kenyah and Kayan tribes of Borneo;[4] nor do they put their sins on the pig, as did the ancient Hebrews on the head of the sacrificial bullock or on the scapegoat.[5] In Toungoo the dog is substituted for the pig in the family rites, the tradition there being that it ate some of the fragments of the book of wisdom. The Rev. E. W. Blythe is authority for the statement that the cat is also offered to the "Bgha" in Toungoo.[6] The Bwe and Red Karen tribes, among whom the ox, buffalo, and goat are the common domestic animals, use one or another of these creatures, according to the manifestations obtained through divination.[7] I am told that in Shwegyin there are some localities where the people do not sacrifice animals of any kind, but make offerings of flowers only.

The leaves used in the feasts must be those of the wild plantain ("ya"), which is found everywhere in the jungle throughout Burma; for the tradition is that it was this variety of plantain which "Htaw Meh Pa," the mythical ancestor of the Karen race, cut off in blazing the trail for his people to follow on the way to a more fruitful land.[8]

The miniature house ("hi hpo kheh") is intended as a resting-place for the "Bgha," when it comes to enjoy the feast provided for it. This tiny structure is set in the inner room where the pig is killed, the sacrificial fireplace built, and the feast held. This fireplace is a sacred family altar apart from the place where the cooking is carried on daily. The inner room affords greater privacy to the family during the feasts. The Pwo Karen have special trays and dishes for their feasts, which are kept sacredly for this purpose.

[3] Colonel A. R. MacMahon, *The Karens of the Gold Chersonese*, pp. 140, ff. For the story of the Lost Book see p. 333.

[4] Hose and MacDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol. II, pp. 60, ff.

[5] Leviticus, 16:21-23.

[6] Rev. E. W. Blythe in *The Rangoon Diocesan Quarterly*, 1917, p. 9.

[7] E. O'Riley in *Journal, Indian Archipelago*, 1858, p. 16.

[8] See *ante*, p. 5.

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CHAPTER XXVII

DIVINATIONS

Recourse is had to the bones of the fowl for prognosticating the future throughout many parts of southeastern Asia. In these regions the chicken is indigenous, and it may be that the custom of examining their bones came about in a natural way, as suggested by Sir J. G. Scott.[1] It would be natural for people entering a new country for the purpose of settling in it to take note of all indications as to its fertility, including the size and condition of the fowls. Perhaps this gives us the clue to the origin of the Karen practice of inspecting the holes of the thigh-bones of the fowl. The words designating this usage are "ka hsaw ki," which literally mean to break the fowl's bones. It may be that originally they actually broke the bones and examined their structure, strength, and condition to determine whether the fowls were well nourished or not, and that later the custom arose of inspecting only the holes in the bones. Why such a change should have taken place is without explanation, unless the people thought they had discovered a relation between the general healthiness of the bones and the pinholes along their sides.

The Karen people themselves connect the origin of this custom with the legends of their early golden age, before they had lost their book or "Mü kaw li" (Satan) had tempted their ancestors to disobey the eternal God, "Y'wa," and had then taught them divination. The story of the Lost Book is found among other peoples in this region of the earth and in brief is as follows: In the beginning "Y'wa" had seven sons, the eldest of whom was the Karen and the youngest, the white man. The father, being about to go on a journey, invited the Karen to accompany him; but the latter declined on the score that he had his field to clear. The Burman also refused to go. However, each of them gave "Y'wa" a gift, the Karen presenting him with a bamboo trough, such as the pigs feed out of, and the Burman, with a paddle.[2] The white brother was induced to accompany his father,

[1] Sir J. G. Scott, *Burma, A Handbook*, 399, ff.

[2] Another version of this myth says that the Karen gave "Y'wa" a "saw ku" or rain cover such as is worn when the people are transplanting rice in the rainy season.

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and, when they got to the sea, they transformed the trough into a boat and the paddle into a mast and sail. By these means they soon reached the celestial shore. While there "Y'wa" prepared three books: one of silver and gold for the Karen, because he was the oldest; one of palm-leaf for the Burman, and one of parchment for their white brother. These were given to the white man, and he accepted them, but kept the silver and gold book himself, sending the parchment book to the Karen by the hands of the Burman. The Karen was busy clearing his fields and, paying little attention to the book, forgot to carry it home. When he burned off his clearing, it was lying on a stump and was nearly destroyed. The pigs and chickens ate the charred remains of it.[3] Thus, the wisdom contained in the book, which the ancestors of the race sorely needed after sickness and trouble came upon them, was nowhere to be found except in the pigs, chickens, and charcoal, and it was to these they turned in their distress. According to the account contained in the "Y'wa" legend, the serpent, "Mū kaw li," was directly responsible for leading them to these sources of wisdom.[4] Such is the mythical story of the origin of divination among the Karen.

If one asks Karens versed in the old poems, why the people consult these omens, they are apt to answer by quoting the following lines:

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"The book of the ages was rooted by the pigs.
At first the women neglected it.
The men also did not look at it.
If both men and women had studied it,
All the world would have been happy."

"Our book of gold that "Y'wa" gave,
Our book of silver that he gave,
The elders did not obey.
Lost, it wandered to the foreigner."

Among the forms of divination the one most in vogue is that of examining the chicken bones. It is used on all occasions. Nothing is undertaken by those retaining the old superstitions, whether of little consequence or great importance to them, without divination,

[3] There are two accounts of the loss of the book, which are about equally common. Besides the version which says that the book was left on the stump, is another relating that the book was left on the floor, near the entrance to the house. Here it lay unheeded, till at last it fell through the cracks and was picked at by the fowls and chewed by the pigs under the house, being finally entirely destroyed. Then, at last, the unhappy people began to feel the need of its guidance.

[4] See Chapter XXI on Religious Conceptions, p. 212.

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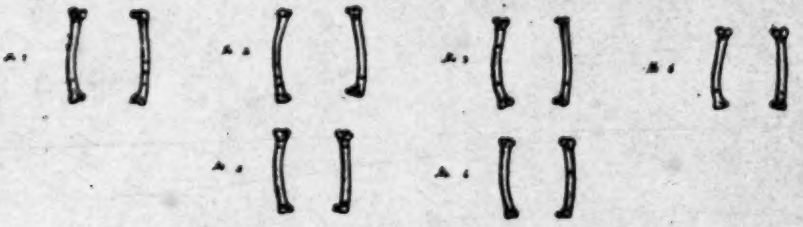
787 usually by inspecting the fowl's bones and obtaining a favorable omen. Detailed accounts, which I have obtained of the interpretation of the arrangement of the holes in the thigh-bones of chickens, show that these vary more or less. The system of readings furnished to me by an old man of the Tharrawaddy district corresponds in general with data from other Sgaw sections. According to this system, the left thigh-bone ("mi") represents the jungle. If this bone has a larger number of holes than the right thigh-bone or has them arranged in a certain way, the omen is unfavorable. That is, the "k' la" or life principle will be influenced by this reading to depart from the body of the person concerned, thus causing his sickness or death. If, however, the bones are being consulted in regard to some undertaking, the reading above indicated would imply that it must be postponed until a favorable omen can be had. The right thigh-bone ("hsa") represents the house, and, when it affords the favorable reading, all is well for the undertaking or the person concerned. The bones are held reversed at the time of reading, the top being called the "hkaw" (literally, the foot), the other end being designated the "hko" (literally, the head). The right ("hsa") and left ("mi") are the reverse of the diviner's right and left.



Chicken Bones Used in Divinations

Six different arrangements of the holes were specified to me, as follows:

(1) In this arrangement the jungle bone ("mi") has three holes, while the house bone ("hsa") has only one. Hence, the diviner says: "Mi a, mi neu hsa," meaning that "the jungle has more and wins over the house. This bodes bad luck or sickness.

(2) This arrangement is the opposite of (1) and is reported as "Hsa a, hsa neu mi." This reading is a prognostication of good fortune.

(3) In this instance the bones show both a foot and a head hole

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on the right and a head but no foot hole on the left. The reading is "Hsaw xi wa ti htaw," and the omen is good. 787

(4) In this instance both the right and left bones show a head hole, the explanation is "Hsaw xi wa hkwa," and the omen is fair.

(5) The bones show foot holes on both sides, the explanation being "Shaw xi ku hko mi." The omen is less than fair.

(6) In this instance the left bone shows only one hole in the middle, a most unfavorable omen. The reading is "Hsaw xi htaw deh pgha k' le." Thra Than Bya says that in case the bones have no holes at all it is a most unfavorable omen; for once in the remote past the signs read this way when a certain king was going to war, and the outcome of his campaign was an utter defeat. Hence, no one will now undertake anything, when he gets this reading of the bones.[5]

If the bones display any of the unfavorable omens, three more attempts are made in the hope of obtaining a better response. Supposing that the omen is being taken in order to ascertain the fate of a sick person and none of the four trials is successful, his relatives and friends will withhold the discouraging information, lest by telling it they should hasten the patient's death. I am unable to give translations of most of the phrases quoted above, for they seem to be in archaic language not readily understood at the present time. I am not sure that the six readings which I have mentioned exhaust the list.

Captain C. E. Poynder and Lieutenant E. W. Carrick have noted that in some of the Bwe and Padaung communities hairs or bamboo splinters are inserted in the holes of the chicken bones. According to Bwe practice, if these slant at the same angle the omen is regarded as being favorable. According to the practice among the Padaung people, if the inserted splinters slant upwards the sign is good, but if inwards it is bad.[6] Before inserting the splinters to see whether a journey may be undertaken, the diviner holds the bones up before him and addresses them, saying: [539]

"O, you supernatural chicken bones!
We are now planning to go and return.
If it is right for us,
Show us a favorable omen.
Do not let the reply turn out bad."

In certain localities the splinters are not inserted until the

[5] Rev. T. Than Bya, M. A. *Karen Customs, Ceremonies, and Poetry*, p. 42.
[6] Capt. C. E. Poynder, *Notes on Bwe Expedition* (Government Press, Rangoon) 1894-5, p. 1; Lieutenant E. W. Carrick, *Notes on Report of Bwe & Padaung Countries*, 1894-5, p. 11.

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bones have been spat upon, rubbed with charcoal, scraped all over with a sickle, and the holes cleaned out. Sometimes the wing-bones are used, but not so generally as the thigh-bones.

Before preparing and eating the feasts in honor of the "Bgha," as has been pointed out elsewhere,[1] the gall-bladder of a pig is examined. If it is full and round, it is evident that the spirits will be pleased with the offering and that good fortune, health, and plenty will follow. This form of divination is common not only among the Karen, but also among the tribes of Malaysia and Borneo.[2]

On occasions of little consequence, and perhaps more often nowadays than formerly, the Sgaw resort to a form of divination in which a number of transverse marks are made at random with a piece of charcoal, which has been spat upon, on a stick of wood or a piece of bamboo. When the space allotted has been filled up, the marks are counted by twos. If it appears that an even number of marks has been made, the affair in hand will turn out well; if not, the same process is gone through a second time in the hope of securing a different result. In case this attempt also fails, the project is abandoned for the present. The use of the charcoal is reminiscent of the charred remains of the Lost Book.

A method that is sometimes used to discover the outcome of an illness may be described as follows. The diviner holds a fresh egg to his mouth, spits upon it, and says: "May this egg show us what is the cause of the illness. If due to the 'Bgha,' may the egg have white streaks on its yolk; if due to the 'th' re ta hka,' may it have red streaks on its yolk; if due to witchcraft, may the red streaks be mixed with blood." After rubbing the sick person with the egg, the elder breaks it open in the palm of his hand and carefully examines the yolk for one of the signs he has mentioned. If he observes any of these, he prescribes the offering to be made to the spirit concerned. If, however, the yolk discloses no particular marks, he repeats the operation and this time prays to "Pa'k' sa Y'wa" (Father God) to aid him: "'Pa k sa Y'wa,' this man is sick. We do not know the reason for it. But you are in heaven and care for all of your children. As you have prophets, give them a word to say." Again the egg is rubbed over the sick person, broken open, and examined. A peculiar appearance of the contents, described to me as consisting of two points connected by fibres going around

[1] See Chapter XXIV on Feasts to the "Bgha," pp. 261, 282.
[2] For Borneo, see Hose & MacDougall, *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol. II, 98, ff.

[See pp. 279-280, Cat. 1/16, Analysis]

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the yolk, is supposed to show that a "ta na" (one of the violent evil demons) has caused the illness and that he will be hard to appease. If the streaks are black, the patient is thought to be doomed to die.

In practicing these various forms of divination the Karen, like other primitive peoples, feel that they are peering into the realm of the unseen but powerful forces that dominate the universe. To the Karen the omens obtained are real revelations, without which they dare not venture into the future. When they fail in their undertakings despite favorable omens, they believe that some other power, opposed to the one invoked, has held sway. Their concern then becomes to win the favor and assistance of this more influential power in their next venture.

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of child-bearing to other members of the village. MacMahon states that the Bwe husband of a newly delivered mother complies with the custom of cutting fresh bamboo joints, in which he draws and heats the water for bathing the infant, over a fire kindled by himself in the open. He then carries the water to his wife's room up a new ladder, which he has made. After his wife has washed the child or he himself, in case she is too weak to do so, he hangs the bamboo joints under the house and leaves them there for six days before they may be used again.[8] On the day of the birth of a child, or even of a domestic animal, members of the village are forbidden to work. This is the tabu of births ("ta dū ta ble").

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In the early times widows and orphans, as well as persons found to be holding improper relations, became tabu and were expelled from the village, in order to keep other inhabitants from falling under the vengeance of the evil-working demon, whose attention might be diverted from his first victims. The driving of these unfortunates into the jungle to live there by themselves, may be described as a kind of primitive quarantine.[9] Precaution of a different kind was at the bottom of the requirement that a visiting stranger should enter and leave the village-house by the same ladder. It was also required that the visitor must descend the ladder while facing inwards. Leaving the house by a different way from that by which one had entered, created suspicion of hostile intent among the inhabitants and might lead to hostilities. Like other neighboring peoples, the Karen observe a tabu in regard to women's garments, which must not come in contact with a man. Garments that are put out to dry must be hung away from the common paths in some inconspicuous place. Probably this custom originated in the fear that the supposed weakness of woman might be communicated to the men. For the same reason, evidently, the Brec tribe prohibits married men from taking part in making the coffin for a woman who has died in child-birth.

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Tabus connected with portents, such as eclipses of the moon, earthquakes, the cries of apes, and certain strange sounds in the jungle, have a religious significance for the Karen and are accompanied by the prohibition of work for one or more days. The witnesses of these portents are seized with fear, drop their work, and stand about in helplessness. This, undoubtedly, is the normal behavior of primitive people under such circumstances. They as-

[8] MacMahon, *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 219.
[9] See Chapter XIV on Social Conditions, pp. 193, 194.

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cribe the portent to some angry demon, who may at any moment impose a worse calamity upon them if they fail to observe this warning. The tabu of labor, until their fears have subsided, is clearly the precept that would suggest itself to people of deep-seated superstitions. According to Karen legend, the dogs that cause the eclipse of the moon by eating that luminary, are colder than water; while the one that swallows the sun, is hotter than fire. In order to prevent excessive heat or cold and the sickness and death that would follow, the people must abstain from work on the days when an eclipse occurs. The Karen name for the tabu of the eclipse is "ta dū ta yu mū ta yu la." [7]

The portent of the earthquake is produced by the mythical giant, "Hai Ghu," when the beetle that feeds on the refuse of human beings, tries to deceive him into believing that the human race has disappeared from the earth. In his wrath the giant shifts the planet from one shoulder to the other, and the people shout to him in consternation: "We are still here. We are still here." When, in times past, the giant caught the beetle in this trick, he struck it in the face, and the beetle has had a flat nose ever since. At the time of an earthquake the people refrain from their work for a day, in order to help restore the equilibrum of the planet and to mollify "Hai Ghu." This practice is called the tabu of the earthquake or "ta dū haw hko hu." [8]

When the apes howl it is a portent that the goddess "Ta La." who dwells on Mount "Thaw Thi," [9] one of the higher peaks of the mountain range separating the Toungoo district from Karenni, is uttering curses, which are greatly feared. In Shwegyin the people ascribe the falling of the leaves in the latter part of February to her imprecations and refrain from work for three days. They believe that if they failed to observe this "ta dū hpa taw" (the long tabu), their crops would be ruined.

The portent of strange sounds in the jungle betokens a combat between two celestial beings, one of whom, "Kwe De," hurls his spear at the other. The whizz of the weapon as it speeds through the air and its thud on striking the ground, evoke the cry, "Htaw law," from those who hear these startling sounds. They must stay at home that day, lest they should be in danger from these mythical spears.

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[7] See Chapter VII, p. 84.
[8] See Chapter XXII, p. 198.
[9] See Chapter XXV, p. 262.

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784 177 342 cerned. In the hills the money is put in a hole in the bamboo ladder leading into the house or, in lieu of a money payment, the fowl is hung under the house. Some persons, who have received the fine in the latter form, have shown a prejudice against eating it. I have been told that the British Government officials have upheld this tabu, when the collection of the fine has been resisted by the offending party.

784 551 Perhaps there is no more widespread tabu among the Karen people than that of personal names.[1] I have known some individuals for years without knowing their names and have used the common expedient of calling them by the name of their eldest son. A man who served as our cook for years in the Baptist school at Tharrawaddy I knew only as "Ba Gyaw's father;" although I did finally discover his own personal name. For a boy to mention his father's name is almost equivalent, according to Karen ideas, to the son's wishing his parent's death; for the spirits, learning the latter's identity, might destroy him. Instead of speaking of his wife, a man will talk of the mother of his children, or of his oldest child whose name he may think it safe to mention. Not long ago a young man of good education, who was engaged in filling his blank application for a marriage certificate, was confronted with the fact that he was unable to give his mother's name. Not infrequently parents bestow opprobrious names on their children, in order to deceive the demons into thinking them too unworthy to be molested.

782 787 823 During the month of July, when the streams are in flood, the people observe the tabu of the rising and falling of the waters ("ta dū ta htaw ta law"). They refrain from labor, make an offering of a fowl all of one color on the path near a stream, and utter the following prayer: "O Lord of the great water and the small water, of the oceans and the lakes. We are offering you a large sweet fowl and sweet rice. Flow in your own banks as usual, so that we shall not be drowned or fall into the water to be devoured by crocodiles and dragons. Watch over us on our journeys, eat our offerings, and do not molest us." They then examine the fowl's bones and the gall-bladder of a pig, and, if the omens are favorable, they swim the stream three times. In case no mishap occurs, they believe that their offerings have been acceptable and that they will prosper. If the omens are not propitious the first time, they try

[1] See Chapter XVIII on Birth Customs and Childhood, p. 170.

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782 787 823 a second time and if necessary a third, in order to obtain a favorable response.

755 The Karen esteem the gall-bladder of a certain variety of fish as a valuable medicine, but assert that during the early days of August this medicinal organ becomes enlarged and "hot" (that is, flabby). They, therefore, consider it necessary to desist from work, in order to restore the gall-bladder to its normal condition and efficacy. During the other months this medicine is thought to be strong and useful in certain severe illnesses.

751 784 The time for gathering the herbs of which dyestuffs are made, is determined by divination. If, however, some one happens to pick them on a day found to be unfavorable, he becomes subject to a tabu, lest colds and coughs should spread throughout the village. To prevent this epidemic, the erring person must cut a sheaf of tall grass and set it up in the ashes of his fireplace, and when the other villagers come in they must spit on it. An elder then takes up the grass, saying: "May all coughs and colds be prevented. May we not catch them." Next, he leads the people out into a field, where he plies their heads and the stumps in the field with the sheaf until it is broken, meantime calling out: "Beat here. Beat there. Beat the tails of the demons and woodpeckers. Do not bring us illnesses, coughs, or colds." When he has finished, he leaves the frayed grass against a stump, and they all return to their houses. Finally, the elder asks in a loud voice: "Is every one well?" and they all shout back: "All are well." This is repeated three times, after which they all shut their doors and refrain from work during the rest of the day.

784 626 While all of these numerous tabus have helped to nourish the ancient superstitions of the Karen, it is well to remember that some of them, in the absence of other social and moral sanctions, have exercised a beneficial influence. Among the latter are the tabus against marriage outside of the tribe, and especially outside of the race. These tabus have been instrumental in maintaining the integrity of the various tribes and of the people as a whole, and in enabling the Karen to live largely apart from the corrupting influences of neighboring peoples. Other tabus have served to magnify the importance of the religious rites and to enforce a stricter morality than prevails among some primitive races. It is obvious that these benefits have been secured at a great economic cost, when one considers the large number of holidays which falls

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Lahu AP13 Wa AP12

K 342 [354] etc. are offered as a sacrifice to the spirits. The fireplace in the center of the single inside room is sunken and rests on a structure made of four posts which rise from under the floor of the hut. Small bamboo pipes containing rice brandy are kept for the house spirits at the entrance to the hut, on the roof, and beneath the fireplace. A pig's skull, a pig's bladder, and a bundle of leaves, together with chicken bones which are used by all the mountain tribes for soothsaying, hang from the rafters. The piles under the house are joined together with crossbeams; the place is used at night as a stable for the buffaloes.

K [782] [776] K [187] K [231]

L 101 342 177 Of the tribes who live in the Southern Shan States, particularly in Kentung and the adjoining areas, the Lahu or Muhsö--1911: 18,103--and the kindred Kwi (26)--1911: 3,189--build

26. UBG I, 1 pp. 576 ff.

their houses either in the Shan style, or, sometimes in the style of the Wa or Yao; the Akha or Kaw (27) together with the AKo--1911: 37,300

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27. Ibid., pp. 588 ff.

--have houses which are raised by low piles. Most of them have only one single overcrowded and neglected interior room.

W 101 Of more interest and importance are the Wa (28).

28. Ibid., pp. 493 ff.; about village and house layouts, pp. 498 ff., 503 ff. Also G. Drage, A Few Notes on Wa (Rangoon, 1907), pp. 34 ff.

A few of the tribes of the "tame" Wa live in Kengtung, Manglun and the adjacent Shan regions --1911: 14,674. Some of them, after embracing